

TVTV

VIDEO PIONEERS 10 YEARS LATER



Doug Michels and a network counterpart, 1972.



In front of the house on Pine Tree Drive: (L to R) Colonel Sanders, Allen Rucker, Anda Korsts, Tom Weinberg, Skip Blumberg, Michael Couzins (behind Blumberg), Judy Newman, Steve Christiansen, Chuck Kennedy, Ira Schneider (kneeling), Martha Miller, Michael Shambberg, Chip Lord (kneeling), Andy Mann, Nancy Cain, Hudson Marquez, Jody Sibert (sitting), Curtis Schreier, Joan Logue, Jim Newman.

Ten years ago, Group W Television purchased two black and white documentaries, transferred the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch video material through a time base corrector to quad, and broadcast the shows in five major markets.¹ The tapes were TTVT's *Four More Years* and *The World's Largest TV Studio* and the Group W transmission became widely accepted as the first time videotape originated on $\frac{1}{2}$ " portapaks was broadcast.²

TTVT (Top Value Television) was an ad hoc group of independent video producers and artists who coalesced around the political conventions of 1972 in Miami Beach, organized by Raindance (New York) and Ant Farm (San Francisco). They invited the participation of other video makers through a loose network of contacts developed through *Radical Software*, the periodical of new video. More than 25 people formed the TTVT crew at the Democratic convention in July, 1972. Working out of a rented house, they swarmed in and around the convention, shooting political stars and cultural events and compiling more than sixty hours of original tape. The tape was logged in Miami and then an editing crew flew to New York between conventions to put together a 60 minute doc that became *The World's Largest TV Studio*.

This first effort suffered a lack of organization and point of view, possibly reflecting the McGovern convention's grass-roots dis-jointedness. Nevertheless, it aired on Cable Channel D in Manhattan several weeks after the convention, providing an irrelevant, close-up view of the Democrats, entirely unlike the TV networks coverage!

When the Nixon party rolled into Miami, TTVT was experienced and better organized. Contacts had been made with network news departments that led to interviews with Walter Cronkite and most of the floor reporters (the exception being Roger Mudd, who re-

fused to talk to Skip Blumberg's camera. Skip's "non-interview" subsequently appeared in the finished tape anyway). Maureen Orth, a print journalist who had signed onto TTVT's crew, doggedly followed Henry Kissinger, who gave her a mini interview before stepping into his limousine. Nixon's corp of Young Republicans provided high profile counterpoint to the well organized Vietnam Veterans against the War, and their insistent chant, *Four More Years*, gave the tape its title.

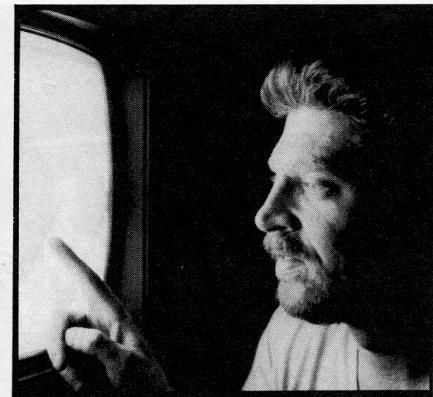
After the conventions, TTVT relocated in San Francisco and signed a "five program" contract with the TV Lab at WNET, the PBS affiliate in New York. In association with David Loxton and the TV Lab, the group produced several more documentaries including *Lord of the Universe*, about the 15 year old perfect master's Millenium festival in the Astrodome; *Gerald Ford's America*, a four part look at the interim president's Washington; a cajun music piece, *The Good Times Are Killing Me*; and an interview with the then-underground Abbie Hoffman. TTVT incorporated as a partnership but they continued to draw on a talent pool of independents for production help. In 1976 they dissolved the partnership.

Video 80s sent questionnaires out to TTVT alumnae and a few other video pioneers. We asked what they were doing then and what they are doing today. The quotes that follow each entry are generally in response to the question: "How would you characterize developments in the video field over the past ten years." Here then, in their own words, are the updated thoughts and resumes of some of Video's Pioneers. — C.L.

1. Air date in San Francisco was October 29, 1972, on KPIX TV.
2. Other $\frac{1}{2}$ " work was probably broadcast first through isolated scan conversion efforts. TTVT's tapes also aired on KQED, San Francisco; Ch. 44, Chicago; WCVB, Boston; KCRA, Sacramento.



Skip Blumberg, Douglas Kiker (NBC floor reporter) and Nancy Cain, 1972.



Stephen Beck

WENDY APPLE

1972: Independent producer/artist, living in New York, creating "personal fantasy mixed with reality shows like *Mary*." CAPS grant, 1972.
 1983: Producer/Director living in Topanga, California. Member of Directors Guild of America. Recent credits include: *Wired In* (PBS); *Lily For President* (CBS); *Up to Now* (HBO); *That's Hollywood* (Fox/ABC); *Sitcom: The Adventures of Garry Marshall* (PBS).

"Regarding general TV programming: Not all that much has changed, except in the across the boards acceptability of Reality/News/Documentary programming as entertainment. Technical irony: The latest video equipment is back to $\frac{1}{2}$ ", only now it is color and expensive."

"In 1972 the TTV crews had the only portable video on the floor of the Presidential Conventions; in 1980 the Convention floor looked like a video trade show.

Within our own video art community, the 60's and early 70's were much more spontaneous and expansive. Many new ideas generated rapidly in the early years. Now artists and producers are generally playing it safer. Tapes are slicker and less political.

I'm doing pretty much the same work although now I shoot in color with broadcast quality in mind and edit with faster cutting. It takes longer to make shows and they are seen by millions of people. I'm still trying to approach the direct naturalism that I was able to attain with $\frac{1}{2}$ " black and white."

area for video artists to circulate work."

NANCY CAIN

1972: Member of Media Bus Inc., Lanesville, N.Y. Producer, Lanesville TV, the weekly low power broadcast.
 1983: Director of Programming, Channel 6, Access TV, Woodstock, N.Y. Co-Director Media Bus Inc., Video Arts and Production Center, Woodstock. Most recent tape: *Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Channel 6 But Were Afraid To Ask*.

"A little more than a decade ago, the dust began to settle after the big 'video revolution.' Many porta-packers were surprised to find that, contrary to the definition of revolution, no visible exchange of power had taken place, and that the only change seemed to be that existing media now used electronic news gathering instead of film. More recently, it has become increasingly clear that video, which early on had been used almost exclusively (not counting 'video art') by protesters to take pictures of cops and by cops to take pictures of protesters, has been absorbed into the main stream. As a matter of fact, many young video producers today have never even heard of the 'video revolution.'

"What has developed in the video area over the last ten years? Well, technology, of course, has developed, and skills have developed, and even jobs (yikes!) have developed. And I think that, sadly, a great distance has developed between the video maker and his/her audience.

SKIP BLUMBERG

1972: Member of Media Bus Inc., the collective evolution of Videofreex that produced a weekly broadcast in Lanesville, New York, called *LANESVILLE TV*.
 1983: Independent producer/video artist living in New York City. Blumberg's *The Eskimo Olympics*, just completed, will air on PBS this spring. His 30 min. doc., *Pick Up Your Feet: The Double Dutch Show* (1981) won a blue ribbon at the American Film Festival and two Emmy's. Recipient of a J.S. Guggenheim Fellowship, 1982.

STEPHEN BECK

1972: Resident electronic artist at the National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED-TV. Received first AFI grant given to a video artist.
 1983: President, Bech-Tech, a company producing energy management computers, video game cartridges, serial VTR control computers, laser animation, and videograms for home video software.

"Slow but steady... in some ways there was more visibility to video art then, by way of PBS and their national interest in broadcasting video art. But now there is a tremendous potential in the home video market. This didn't exist 10 years ago, and it is a very promising

“Our generation failed television. Television didn’t fail us....”



Steve Christiansen

One rarely sees a porta-packer other than the odd dentist from New Jersey, with a G.E. VTR slung over his shoulder. Most early video people have switched to larger and more expensive formats and gear their production for major markets.

Of course, there are still producers and programmers struggling to maintain open access to television by the public, against growing difficulties from cable companies who see each channel as another ‘pay tier,’ and from many municipalities with an eye toward censorship. Against all odds, access television is often the most surprising and interesting fare on the dial. And that’s a development, too.”

FRANK CAVESTANI

1972: Operated a non-profit company called Video New York and shot a 16mm documentary about Ron Kovic and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War at the Republican National Convention in Miami.

1983: Living in Los Angeles and writing and selling feature film screenplays including one about black rodeo cowboys, commissioned by Motown Productions, scheduled for production this spring.

“I can see the influence of some video artists and their tapes on current mainstream TV in such shows as ‘Real People’ and in the ENG systems now routinely used to gather news. However, the main body of this wave of videomakers has been locked out of the prime-

time area of television, and just a minuscule amount of their inventive ideas have been gleaned for the general viewing audience. Even in the cable area this does not seem about to change. It gives me less hope for the future. At least in television.”

LAURA CAVESTANI

1972: Living in New York City with Frank, producing an anti-war movie called *Operation Last Patrol*.

1983: Living in Los Angeles, trying to raise money to produce a karate movie, scripted with Emil Parkus. The script is loosely based on the ‘Chinese Mafia’ in New York City.

“10 years ago my life was pretty much wound up with videotape on a real pragmatic level. Now it’s more abstract. I talk to TV producers, pitch movie-of-the-week projects and dream about writing and producing big feature films. I hope I can get over it pretty soon so I can settle down and spend the rest of my life writing novels.”

STEVE CHRISTIANSEN

1972: Establishing a communications curriculum at Antioch College, working with Steve Paxton on the dance/video continuum, and making rural television out of Yellow Springs, Ohio.

1983: Independent producer producing mini-documentaries on regional issues for Oregon Public Broadcasting, developing fea-

ture length documentary projects, and actively involved in the politics of cable access in Eugene, Oregon, where he lives.

“Video has evolved from a cult item to a household word and the medium is rapidly interfacing with almost every aspect of American culture. Among producers, roles have become more specialized, and much more attention is now focused on markets and the business of video.”

BART FRIEDMAN

1972: Member of Media Bus Inc., Lanesville, New York, formerly Videofreex.

1983: Co-Director Media Bus Inc., Video Arts and Production Center, Woodstock, New York.

STANTON KAYE

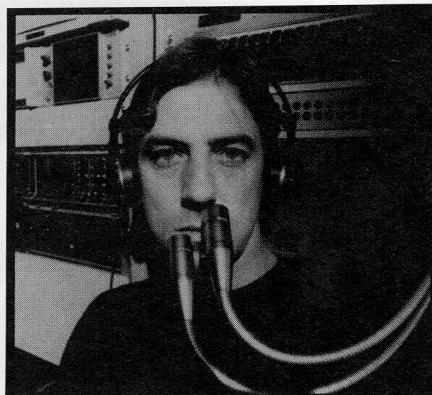
1972: Recovering from the American Film Institute’s refusal to release *In Pursuit of Treasure* (Kaye was a filmmaker fellow at the AFI where his feature film was produced).

1983: President and Chairman for two international corporations producing innovative technology for information services. “I own the edge of every thick document.” (Apparently a reference to the Edge print patent that he co-authored with Curtis Schreier). Lives in Venice, California.

“Video over the past ten years has tried to move closer to the ‘brain’s natural



Hudson Marquez



Doug Michels

functions. I'm about to grant myself a huge bonus check to do a work of art."

CHIP LORD

1972: Partner in Ant Farm, living in Angleton, Texas during construction of The House of the Century, a ferro cement vacation house for a Texas millionaire. Official photographer for TVT in Miami.

1983: Visiting Lecturer in video at University of California, San Diego; Art Director and contributor to this magazine; artist working in video and photography. Lives in San Francisco.

"Despite misgivings about the influence and intent of the medium (television) and the sub-medium (video), I continue to have fun working in it. I like the possibilities of DVE, Quantel, Chryon and 1", despite the precious, time-is-money attitude surrounding them and the numbing commercialization inherent in their use on T.V. I still think artists do the R & D and big audiences don't matter."

HUDSON MARQUEZ

1972: Living in Northern California having retired from the art business. Shot farm animals and avoided barbershops.

1983: Taxpayer/citizen, currently a staff writer on a syndicated TV show. Paints representative canvasses and has a one-man show coming up this summer in Los

Angeles. "I don't know if I can comment on Video Video, because I have at all costs avoided that bunch of boring claptrap and art pretension. I love television. I like it even more now because it's worse than ever. I mean it really sucks now. My favorite show is Family Feud and I like People's Court a lot, too. TV still does live events best and I can't wait for locker room snafus after championship sports events. The news is good, but in general all TV is background wallpaper for eating, reading or fucking. I don't have much hope that it will change for the better because I have been in the belly of the broadcast beast and it's ugly. So, hit your remote switch and drift off into numbing nirvana."

DOUG MICHELS

1972: Ant Farm culture-hero.

1983: American Visionary living in Los Angeles creating avant-garde Art and Architecture projects. . . . *The Future Idea* is a positive synthesis of advanced technology and creative freedom.

"D O L P H I N I Z E"

ALLEN RUCKER

1972: Living in San Francisco, former founder of Media Access Center, soft-associate of Ant Farm, initial organizer of TVT.

1983: TV Writer-producer living in Los Angeles. Developing comedy and non-fiction projects for Universal Television.

"Ten years ago, there was no late-nite youth TV, no 'reality' TV, no original cable TV, no music video. Video people led the way, but dropped the ball."

PAUL RYAN

1972: Artist/writer living in the Walkill sub-basin of the Hudson Valley. Using video to decode ecology. Worked with TTV in Washington on *Gerald Ford's America*.

1983: Living in Hoboken, developing a collaboration with Frank Gillette on comparative observations of two coastlines. NYSCA grant for a book, *Work of Art in the Age of Electronic Circuitry*.

"The past ten years have been disappointing in terms of original intent, yet still fecund in diversity. Still ungrounded in larger cultural context. Art world insufficient, needs to link up with functional cosmology grounded in eco-reality."

IRA SCHNEIDER

1972: Artist, partner in Raindance, New York City. Publisher/editor of *Radical Software*.

1983: Adjunct professor of art at Cooper Union. Working on programming (Intelligent Television) for cable TV and other distribution modes, to present the work of artists and independent producers.

"In the late 60's and early 70's we got funds to produce alternatives to the commercial commodity media on TV."

“The energy is more diffuse now, then it was very high energy — it was staggering, in fact to contemplate”



Tom Weinberg's son Jesse. Future in video?

Distribution was our problem. Now, with cable TV and other delivery systems, there are many more channels of distribution; but, now sources of funding for alternatives to the conventional are drying up."

ELON SOLTES

1972: Teaching workshops; producing the April Video Conference & Jamboree; making 'art' and tapes in New York City for public access and for cable in upstate New York.

1983: Independent producer, living in Los Angeles. Producing, writing, directing and editing, including shows for HBO, Fox and ABC. Just completed *Wired In*, a pilot/demo about the Technocomputer revolution (with Wendy Apple and Tom Weinberg).

"Trying to hold onto the spontaneity and enthusiasm of early video while packaging it for a broader audience — 'making it more accessible,' not always easy . . . working in Los Angeles (the belly of the beast). But keeping a safe distance from the main line biz — so far, at least! The gear is better, but it's too damn clunky. There are lots more electronic gizmos available, but it still comes down to the sensibility behind it all."

CURTIS SCHREIER

1972: Partner in Ant Farm, living in San Francisco. Involved in architecture and video graphics.

1983: Inventor, graphic artist, computer designer, carpenter. Lives in San Francisco. Holds several patents including the EdgeData Inc. patent that he co-authored with Stanton Kaye.

MICHAEL SHAMBERG

1972: Partner in Raindance, Author of *Guerilla Television*, initial organizer of TTVT.

1983: Movie Producer, producing theatrical feature films. Currently producing *The Big Chill*, written and directed by Lawrence Kasdan, and starring Tom Berenger, Glenn Close, William Hurt, Jeff Goldblum, Mary Kay Place, Meg Tilly, Kevin Kline, Jocelyn Williams.

"All the improvements seem to have gone into hardware, very little excitement in programming except for some music videos."

PARRY TEASDALE

1972: Working with Media Bus, the Corporation that metamorphized out of Videofreex in Lanesville, New York. On March 20, 1972 Lanesville TV went on the air with the first local broadcast of an experimental, community effort in low power television.

1983: Chairman of Television Center Inc., Washington D.C., a consulting firm helping people get involved with low power TV, i.e. filing applications, and prepar-

ing plans for new TV stations. Currently involved in a legal battle for a low power license in the area where Lanesville TV first broadcast — "I'm trying to run a TV station."

"The pace has slowed in ten years, the sophistication has increased. There is greater realism, about who the audience or potential audience is. The energy is more diffuse now, then it was very high energy — it was staggering, in fact, to contemplate."

TOM "SCORE" WEINBERG

1972: Partner in Instant Replay, a Chicago based production company. One of the initial organizers of TTVT.

1983: Producer with WTTW, Chicago, producing Image Union, a weekly showcase of independent video and video art; Bored Chairman, Center for New Television, Chicago; Executive Producer, *Wired-In* (pilot).

"Turns out it's NOT cheaper, NOT lighter, NOT faster. People are far more aware of being taped . . . the innocence is gone. TV stinks. I wish we weren't so involved with it. I do my best to have kids watch tapes, not turn on TV."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following TTVT pioneers we were unable to contact, or did not receive replies from by press time:

Michael Couzins	Andy Mann
Chuck Kennedy	Martha Miller
Anda Korsts	Jody Sibert
Joan Logue	Megan Williams